

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

090915Z Jul 05

ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	USNW-00	A-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	DODE-00	DOEE-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EUR-00	OIGO-00	UTED-00
	VC-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00
	VCE-00	M-00	AC-00	NEA-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-00
	OIG-00	OMB-00	NIMA-00	PA-00	MCC-00	PER-00	PM-00
	GIWI-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00
	SS-00	TRSE-00	EVR-00	FMP-00	BBG-00	R-00	ECA-00
	IIP-00	SCRS-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00
	NFAT-00	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/001W			

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FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1944
AMEMBASSY ABUJA
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY BAMAOKO
AMEMBASSY KAMPALA
AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

UNCLAS NDJAMENA 001077

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, DRL, INR, LONDON AND PARIS FOR
AFRICA-WATCHERS
INFO AF/PD (DWHITMAN)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM CD](#)

SUBJECT: ERODING PRESS FREEDOMS IN CHAD

SENSITIVE

REF: NDJAMENA 864, 946

1. (SBU) Summary: Press freedoms continue to erode in Chad. Of particular concern is the recent arrest of three journalists from the independent press. Two are now free, but remain under threat of further prosecution, while a third is still in custody. Independent media, including newspapers and radio, continue to voice strong critiques of the Deby regime. The Ambassador has met with the Minister of Communication and the Minister of Justice to express USG concerns about the situation. The Ambassador also held a press conference to discuss the importance of press freedoms. End Summary

UPDATE ON ARRESTS

2. (SBU) Al-Hadj Djarma and Samory Ngaradoub, both from the independent L'Observateur, were arrested on June 16th and June 21st respectively. They were brought to trial on defamation charges, based on the publication of an "open letter" from the Kreda ethnic group, and two subsequent editorials, that criticized the regime's treatment of the Kreda people. Both journalists were freed on July 7th. However, multiple sources suggest that they will be brought back to court later this month on civil charges. The third journalist, Michael Didama of Le Temps, was arrested on June 22nd and remains in custody, charged with incitement to violence, and false attribution of a gruesome photo depicting dead bodies that Le Temps claims is from a massacre in Eastern Chad.

VISIT TO MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION

3. (SBU) The Ambassador paid a visit to the Minister of Communication (MOC) on June 27th in order to express USG concern over the matter. In a wide-ranging and open dialogue that lasted over an hour, the Ambassador and the MOC discussed the particulars of the three cases, the need for press freedoms in a nascent democracy such as Chad, and ways in which the USG has helped to promote an open and professional press corps in Chad. The Ambassador highlighted the wealth of press programs undertaken by Embassy N'Djamena, including recent journalism training programs, and an equipment give-away to 35 different media outlets. He expressed the mission's willingness to help Chad develop a professional press. He also cautioned the MOC against provoking a larger crisis in trying to stop journalists from printing their stories, reminding the MOC that such actions will draw attention in the USG and the international community will be very preoccupied with the

arrests. The Ambassador encouraged the MOC to find a solution to the problem as soon as possible, and expressed his hope that the three journalists would be released without delay.

MOC COMMENTS/REACTION

14. (SBU) The MOC expressed his thanks to the Ambassador, calling the USG a good partner in helping Chad's journalists with material and financial aid, as well as training. He spoke at length of what he called a "cultural problem" among journalists, saying that they did not know how to handle sensitive information. The MOC stated that all three journalists were arrested for "incitement to rebellion", and often referred to the "lack of professionalism" among Chadian media. He expressed the view, also found in the government media, that Al-Hadj Djarma of L'Observateur is not a real journalist, and "often says things in the wrong way." He charged that the photo of the massacre published by Le Temps was taken from the internet and actually depicts a massacre in Sudan. The MOC also stated that he has personally lobbied for the release of the journalists, that the matter is no longer in his hands, and that he will be happy to see them released.

He requested USG assistance in developing a "code of good conduct" for Chadian journalists.

VISIT TO MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

15. (SBU) The Ambassador paid a visit to the Minister of Justice (MOJ) on July 6th to discuss the arrests, and several other matters. The Ambassador again expressed USG concerns over the three journalists, and journalistic freedoms in Chad. The Ambassador complimented the MOJ on a recent speech that the MOJ gave in which he spoke about the importance of respect for human rights, including the right of free expression. The Ambassador expressed the hope that Chad can avoid a situation in which the world views it as a country that does not respect the liberty of the press. He reminded the MOJ that the journalist still in detention, Michael Didama, was a participant in the Embassy's International Visitors program in 2002, when he spent three weeks in the U.S. studying investigative journalism. The PAO, also present at the meeting, informed the MOJ that the Public Affairs Section is conducting a three-week training session for 15 Chadian journalists in Yaounde in late July. Both of these programs illustrate the mission's commitment to training Chadian journalists, and encouraging them to be more professional. The Ambassador also took the opportunity to discuss the 2005 trafficking in persons (TIP) report with the MOJ, mentioning in particular the problems of child cattle herders, involuntary domestics, and childhood prostitution. In addition, the Ambassador gave the MOJ an update on the Embassy's program to support the Chadian judicial system.

MOJ COMMENTS/REACTION

16. (SBU) The MOJ thanked the Ambassador for the judicial assistance program, and expressed his wish that the program move ahead as quickly as possible, due to the great operational difficulties faced by judges in Chad. He expressed his "personal concern" with the problems discussed in the TIP report, and assured the Ambassador that he is working on solutions to improve childhood welfare in Chad. On the arrests of journalists, the MOJ stated that "liberty of the press in an option, and we have opted for this liberty." He said that press freedoms are improving in Chad, but that "personal attacks cannot make a free press prosper." The MOJ emphasized the importance of dialogue, saying that he will always seek to avoid violence, and calling arrest "a kind of violence." He expressed the hope that in the coming years, these types of arrests will no longer occur in Chad.

PRESS CONFERENCE/MEDIA ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

17. (SBU) On July 1st, the Ambassador held a press conference to discuss the Embassy's democracy building programs in Chad, including judicial support, civics education, the "Right to Know" radio broadcasts, girls' scholarships, and oil revenue transparency. He also discussed the importance of press freedom with the media, stating that the press should be free to express itself, and also free of fear of arrest and harassment. The press

conference was followed by a ceremony to mark the hand-over of approximately \$60,000 of equipment to 35 separate media outlets, including private and public radio, television, and print media. The equipment included cameras, fax machines, generators, computers, tape recorders and motorbikes. The events received wide coverage in the media: radio FM Libert played excerpts of the Ambassador's remarks, while at least two newspapers published lengthy accounts of the press conference and detailed lists of the material the Embassy has provided to the media.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Chad has enjoyed -- and for the most part continues to enjoy -- a boisterously free-wheeling press. Worries about the recent referendum lifting presidential term limits, President Deby's health, tensions on Chad's eastern border with Sudan, and other pressures are nonetheless making the regime even jumpier. Despite the release of two of the three journalists jailed for criminal charges, its willingness to put up with criticism is wearing thin. International press organizations are taking notice. Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists have already sent strongly worded protests.

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